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**Don Quixote**  
**Some War-time Reflections**  
on  
**Its Character and Influence**

BY

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## DON QUIXOTE

### SOME WAR-TIME REFLECTIONS ON ITS CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE

#### I

THE war proved for most of us a great trier of the spirits of books as well as men. Some which we had read with amusement, even with apparent profit, failed us in our need. A few found their most complete escape in the region of pure science, detached intellectual inquiry. One friend of mine and scholar sat apparently unmoved through the weeks from Mons to the Marne and the Marne to Ypres, absorbed in the collation of manuscripts of Pelagius. Others, like Mr. Wells, felt themselves impelled to an attempt to re-read the riddle of a painful world and invent, if they could not discover, a God to clear up the mess sometime and somehow. Mysticism and the occult claimed a larger following ; hence, among other causes, the popularity for a time of Dostoievsky and the Russians and the much greater popularity of *Raymond* and the literature of communication with the dead. Pious souls were sustained and comforted by what seemed to others the strangest husks, the least illuminating, consoling or ennobling revelations of Life behind the veil. For some of us, on the other hand, the most readable books were just those which were most entirely human, neither philosophical nor mystical, sentimental nor cynical, but simply human, pictures of the normal life of men and women, illuminated with playful irony but a light that is also warmed by a genial though not too obtrusive sympathy. Of all such books *Don Quixote* proved itself *facile princeps*. Not even Shakespeare, and certainly no other, Fielding or Jane Austen or Dickens or Charles Lamb, furnished quite the same armour of proof against outrageous fortune, provided quite the same blend of amusement with that affection and respect for humanity which alone seemed worthy of an epoch of such appalling sacrifice and suffering. To seek complete distraction at such a moment in science or art or amusement required qualities that are superhuman or inhuman ; but without obscuring altogether our consciousness of the tragic background of reality *Don Quixote* enabled us to endure by transferring us in



imagination to a happier and yet a quite human world, a world where fighting and misadventure are not ignored or forgotten, but all is sweetened by the humanities of love and laughter and good fellowship and good cheer, which relaxes without unbracing the muscles of endurance and passionate resistance to cruelty and injustice. 'Delight in several shapes' is the title which James Mabbe gave to his Elizabethan version of six of the *Novelas Exemplares*. Delight in manifold form is the lot of the peruser of *Don Quixote* at a time like the present, a work whose satire on human nature is held in solution by a stream of unfailing humour and kindliness, whose two heroes are not more absurd than they are admirable and lovable, in all whose varied characters, from knight and priest, duke and duchess, to innkeeper and convict, none is wholly hateful.

The centenary of Cervantes fell in the middle of the world-war and evoked in this country at least two interesting appreciations, Professor Fitzmaurice Kelly's learned address and Professor W. P. Ker's characteristically subtle analysis of the various strands which are interwoven in the great masterpiece. The present writer is not a Spanish scholar, but is tempted to record some of the impressions which a restudy of this great comedy, under war conditions, and a reconsideration of its echoes in English and European literature, have renewed and deepened. The first of these is the impression of *Don Quixote* as the parent of the modern novel. So much has been written about the slow evolution of the novel in the century and a half which followed, till all the currents united in *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*, that it comes upon a reader as something of a surprise to realize that here, in *Don Quixote*, are all the essentials of the *genre*. Here is the proper style, theme, and material. The style, as the author himself says, 'runs musically, plainly, and pleasantly, with clear, proper, and well-placed words.' Malory's style is one of rare quality and beauty, but it is the style of romance, not of the novel. Cervantes is the first great master in prose of that pleasant mode of narrative in which the author seems to take you by the hand and to converse with you agreeably on the road—apostrophizing, commenting, digressing, a style in which Fielding and Thackeray have been among his happiest followers; George Meredith too, were it not that Meredith's colloquial gambols are sometimes as awkward as they are fantastic. What delightful digressions those of Cervantes are themselves and have been the occasion of in others—the priest and the barber in *Don Quixote*'s library, Parson Adams upon Homer, Fielding on the comic epic in prose! Even the more poetic flights, the descriptions of dawn, the eloquence of the knight when he dilates to



Sancho or the canon, do not disturb but enhance the harmony of the whole, and found an amusing and variously toned echo in Fielding and Meredith, as at the introduction of Sophia, or the meeting of Richard and Lucy.

But Cervantes' enchanting style is the natural and beautiful vesture for his subject-matter, and that is again just the proper subject of the novel, human nature and the ordinary everyday life of men. It would have been so easy for Cervantes, in revolting from the unrealities of romance, in seeking to bring romance into ludicrous contact with reality, to slip either into mere burlesque or into the tedious violence and sordid details of the *picaresque* romance as that had already taken shape in *Lorenzo de Tormes*. He did neither; but, instead, he invented, as by a divine accident, the comic epic in prose which is just the modern novel of life and manners. The world of romance lies east of the sun and west of the moon, and its epoch is that of good Haroun Alraschid or brave King Arthur. The world of burlesque has features of real life at a definite era, England under the Commonwealth, or Italy in the sixteenth century; but that world is conceived in an abstractly ludicrous and satirical fashion. No one rises from the perusal of *Hudibras* or of the *Secchia Rapita* with any such impression of life in Puritan England or Italian city politics and wars as *Don Quixote* conveys of Spanish life and character in the reign of Philip the Fourth. The sunny atmosphere of the whole does not falsify the details.

This is the aspect of Cervantes' work which floods the imagination with most surprise and delight when one returns to it remembering chiefly one's early naive pleasure in the fantastic adventures. Here is God's plenty! We linger with the same pleasure among the people who meet us on every page as we do with the pilgrims who rode to Canterbury, or as we make the acquaintance of the peasants and beggars and lawyers and ministers and gipsies who crowd the best chapters of the Waverley Novels. Don Quixote sets out to achieve heroic exploits, worthy of Don Amadis, deeds that are 'to obliterate the memory of the Platirs, the Tablantes, Olivantes and Tirantes, the Knights of the Sun and the Belianises with the whole tribe of the famous knights-errant of times past.' He sees everything through the glamour of romance, but the romance eludes him, melting into reality, and that reality is to us who read more delightful than any romance. Here are innkeepers, themselves readers of romances, but not disposed therefore to approve of Don Quixote's omitting to pay his bill on the ground that he is a knight-errant and the inn a castle; frail but good-hearted chambermaids like Maritornes; jovial souls

who toss Sancho in a blanket, 'four cloth-workers of Segovia, three needle-makers of the horse-fountain of Cordova, and two butchers of Seville, all arch, merry, good-hearted, and frolicsome fellows'. We listen to the priest and the barber as in *Don Quixote's* library they talk learnedly and critically of romances and pastorals and poems, Spanish and Italian, before they deliver them over to the secular arm of the housekeeper. We take the road with Don Quixote, and traverse meadows dotted with white-sailed windmills which he takes for armed giants, or hear by night the roar and clanking of some monster and find as day breaks that the monster is a fulling-mill turned by a water-fall, or, entering a boat, like Lancelot and Galahad, in quest of adventure, we are borne down a swift stream and only saved from drowning by a flour-miller and his men. We see the village barber scouring the plain, leaving his ass as booty for Sancho, his basin to become Mambrino's helmet on the head of him of the Sorrowful Countenance. We interview convicts on their way to the galleys and hear their own account of their crimes; or companies of mounted carriers who visit on Sancho and the knight the amorous indiscretions of Rozinante. We dine in the open air with shepherds and goatherds, and listen to their songs and ballads and stories of unhappy lovers. The pastoral element is, indeed, the only one not perfectly adjusted to the realism of the setting, but the effect is not inharmonious. 'That piping of shepherds and pretty sylvan ballet which dances always round the principal figures is delightfully pleasant to me', says Thackeray, who was reading *Don Quixote* while he was writing of Colonel Newcome. Everything else is real—the ladies in coaches on their way to Seville to meet husbands returning from the Spanish Indies; Benedictines on mules protected from the dust by face-masks and glasses; a funeral that passes by night with mounted torch-bearers and mourners; a cart driven by a hideous devil carrying Death and an angel with coloured wings, and a crowned Emperor and Cupid with his bow and quiver—in short the actors in a Corpus Christi play, for this is Spain, and Spain is still in the Middle Ages. Or again it is a cart conveying a present of lions to the king at Madrid; or the puppet-show where a boy interprets as Hamlet offered to interpret to Ophelia. Always there is abundance of good eating and drinking, with much pleasant conversation, at Camacho's wedding, or the house of the wealthy franklin Don Diego, or the palace of the duke or the inn, or in the open air, where Don Quixote and Sancho and the Bachelor and Tom Cecial eat and talk and sleep in the warm Spanish night by the river-side. All the rich and varied life of Spain flows past us as we read, giving everywhere the



same impression that this fantastic story has for setting neither the unreal world of romance nor the harsh brutalities of *picaresque* story, but the genial happenings of everyday, normal human life.

But this truthful, vivid picture and setting only deepens our admiration of the art with which Cervantes has drawn his two heroes and adjusted them to their setting, made them real and lovable persons in a real world, allowing for the element of exaggeration and abstraction inseparable from comedy, not fantastic, or, as the shepherds are, poetic intrusions from another plane. The depth of Cervantes' picture is not less admirable than its breadth and variety; and it is worth while considering what are the qualities which give his two heroes their hold at once on truth and on our affection and admiration, make them not only realities in a world of realities but two of the great symbolic characters of literature, like Faust and Hamlet, types of humanity whose dreams no disillusionment can altogether destroy, humanity so material and gross, yet so prone to faith and hero worship.

The first great quality of Don Quixote, natural and admirable, is his impeccable courage. No danger daunts him, no disaster dismays, and yet there is no suggestion of exaggeration. He remains a plain, simple Spanish gentleman, lean, cadaverous, and of a sorrowful countenance. For his courage has its roots in two qualities of human nature, and not least of Spanish character. His is the traditional courage of a class and a people, the courage of those who have learnt to think of cowardice as for them impossible. 'A gentleman', says Montesquieu, 'may be careful of his property, never of his life.' The *moral* of a battalion, it is said, depends on its traditions. To the splendid courage of the Spanish gentlemen of the sixteenth century no one has borne witness more whole-heartedly than their great enemy Sir Walter Raleigh :

Here, I cannot forbear to commend the Spartan fortitude of the Spaniards. We seldom or never find that any nation has endured so many adventures and miseries as the Spaniards have done in their Indian discoveries; yet persisting in their enterprises with inviolable constancy, they have annexed to their kingdom so many goodly provinces as bury remembrance of all danger past. Tempests, shipwrecks, famine, overthrows, heat and cold, pestilence, and all manner of diseases, both old and new, together with extreme poverty and want of all things needful, have been the enemies wherewith everyone of their most noble discoverers at one time or other hath encountered. Many years have passed over some of their heads in the search of not so many leagues; yea, more than one or two have spent their labour, their wealth, and their lives, in search of a golden kingdom, without getting further notice of it than what they had at their first setting



forth. All of which notwithstanding, the third, fourth and fifth have not been disheartened. Surely they are worthily rewarded with those treasures and paradises which they enjoy, and well they deserve to hold them if they hinder not the like virtues in others; which (perhaps) will not be found.

But Don Quixote's courage has in it a finer element than that of the adventurer for El Dorado. It is also the courage of the Spanish saint and martyr, like St. Teresa, the courage of one who follows a spiritual vision through every peril and perplexity. But a saint could not well be the hero of a comedy; and Cervantes had to make him what the saint sometimes verges on, or appears to the world to be, a madman, the victim of a fixed idea, yet no less fundamentally sane than the great saints from St. Paul ('I am not mad, most noble Festus!') to St. Francis. Don Quixote combines all the forms of madness which Shakespeare records—the lunatic's, the lover's, and the poet's. If he does not see 'more devils than vast hell can hold', he discovers the hand of magicians in every misadventure which befalls him. The envy and evil arts of magicians are his solution of every perplexity, his refuge in every assault which threatens his illusion. He is a lover, too, in the old high way, one of those lovers

who thought love should be  
So much compounded of high courtesy  
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks  
Precedents out of beautiful old books;

and 'he discovers Helen's beauty' in a country lass who 'can pitch the bar with the lustiest swain in the parish.' He is a poet whose imagination clothes the most ordinary objects and occurrences in such vivid colours of illusion as compel belief. Nothing in the romances Cervantes was parodying is so enchantingly romantic as Don Quixote's descriptions to Sancho Panza of the achievements and adventures which await him (c. xxi) or the *Apologia* for the credibility of his beloved romances with which he overwhelms the sceptical canon who 'stood in admiration to hear the medley Don Quixote made of truth and lies, and to see how skilled he was in all matters relating to knight-errantry' (cc. xlix, l). It is vain to argue with him, for the glowing pictures which his imagination evokes overflow the pales and forts of reason with such a flood of enchantment that the knight is swept away on the high tide of his own eloquence, with Sancho Panza following in his wake like a clumsy coble in the tow of a swift-winged yacht. But in thus building belief upon imagination and desire Don Quixote is typical of nine-tenths of mankind. The fiction and poetry we read has more effect in shaping our early anticipations of life than

the critical intellect. If we do not believe what we desire we are prone to fall into the worse delusion of believing only what we fear. Scott selected the same type of hero for his first romance, Edward Waverley, misled by an early indulgence in romance and poetry. In each case there was something of the author in the hero. Lockhart's *Apologia*, in the last chapter of his great biography, for the errors which involved Scott's financial disasters is a sympathetic but candid appreciation of the day-dreams which shaped the world of Scott's activities, activities at first glance so practical, his 'romantic idealization of Scottish aristocracy'. Scott was himself a Don Quixote dreaming of the past as still present or capable of being revived, 'a scheme of life, so constituted originally, and which his fancy pictured as capable of being so revived as to admit of the kindest personal conduct between (almost) the peasant at the plough, and the magnate with revenues rivalling the monarch's. It was the patriarchal, the clan system that he thought of.' But Scott's portrayal of the dreamer in Edward Waverley is restrained by didactic considerations—he wishes to warn others against his own errors; and the character is, like most of Scott's heroes, but half alive. Cervantes poured himself into his creation in a torrent of sympathy and humour, and made of his hero the perennial symbol of dream-ridden humanity.

But even as Scott's dreams interest us because they were the dreams of a man of sound common sense, wise judgement, and genial humour, so Don Quixote is great because he is neither a mere dreamer nor a hateful buffoon, like Hudibras, but a man of high character and fine sanity, a gentleman and a scholar. If the knight's madness moves us to laughter, it is his sanity and nobility which extort our admiration and love, and Cervantes has achieved this combination without any suggestion of unreality or sentimentality such as would inevitably have marred a character drawn on deliberately preconceived lines. On every one who encounters Don Quixote, he produces the same impression of folly and sanity inextricably blended. 'The canon gazed earnestly at him and stood in admiration of his strange and unaccountable madness, perceiving that in all his discourses and answers he discovered a very good understanding, and only lost his stirrups when the conversation happened to turn upon the subject of chivalry!' 'Don Quixote went on with his discourse in such a manner and in such proper expressions that none of those who heard him at that time could take him for a madman.' 'Ah! Signor Don Quixote, have pity on yourself, and return into the bosom of discretion, and learn to make use of those great abilities Heaven has been pleased to bestow upon you by employing that happy talent you are blessed with

in some other kind of reading.' 'Pray, sir,' says Don Lorenzo to his father, 'who is the gentleman you have brought us home? For his name, his figure, and your telling us he is a knight-errant, keep my mother and me in great suspense.' 'I know not what to answer you, son,' replied Don Diego, 'I can only tell you that I have seen him act the part of the maddest man in the world, and then talk so ingeniously that his words contradict and undo all his actions.'

On no theme does Don Quixote discourse more sanely or more nobly than the motive of all his extravagances. The romantic and fantastic aspects of his adventure are naturally those on which the knight most often expatiates to Sancho Panza—glory, and the gaining of kingdoms, and the wedding of beautiful princesses, and rewarding of squires, for Cervantes' work is a comedy, not a piece of sentimental symbolism like *The Blue Bird*. But in the great discourse at the inn his hero rises to a higher conception of his task. Cervantes affords a glimpse of the high and pure idealism which underlies the knight's absurdities, of that aspect of his creation which Fielding and our own eighteenth-century novelists were to emphasize in its full significance. The hero defines his aim in words that seem to be almost a conscious echo of Dante's *De Monarchia*.

In truth, gentlemen, if it be well considered, great and unheard of things do they seek who profess the order of knight-errantry. . . . There is no doubt but that this art and profession exceeds all that have ever been invented by men, and so much the more honourable is it by how much it is exposed to more dangers. Away with those who say that letters have the advantages over arms; I will tell them, be they who they will, that they know not what they say. For the reason they usually give, and which they lay the greatest stress upon, is that the labours of the brain exceed those of the body, and that arms are exercised by the body alone; as if the use of them were the business of porters, for which nothing is necessary but downright strength; or as if in this, which we who profess it call chivalry, were not included the acts of fortitude, which require a very good understanding to execute them; or as if the mind of the warrior who has an army, or the defence of a besieged city, committed to his charge, does not labour with his understanding as well as his body. It being so then that arms employ the mind as well as letters, let us next see whose mind labours most, the scholar's or the warrior's. And this may be determined by the scope and ultimate end of each; for that intention is to be the most esteemed which has the noblest end for its object. Now the end and design of letters (I do not now speak of divinity, which has for its aim the raising and conducting souls to heaven; for to an end so endless as this no other can be compared), I speak of human learning, whose end, I say, is to regulate distributive justice, and give to every man his due, to know good laws and cause



them to be strictly observed, an end most certainly generous and exalted, and worthy of high commendation, but not equal to that which is annexed to the profession of arms, whose object and end is peace, the greatest blessing men can wish for in life. Accordingly the first good news the world received was what the angels brought on that night which was our day, when they sang in the clouds, *Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of goodwill*, and the salutation which the best master of earth or heaven taught His followers and disciples was that, when they entered into any house, they should say, *Peace be to this house*: and many other times He said, *My peace I give unto you, My peace I leave with you, Peace be amongst you*. A jewel and legacy worthy of coming from such a hand; a jewel without which there can be no happiness either in heaven or earth. This peace is the true end of war; for to say arms or war is the same thing.<sup>1</sup> (C. xxxvii.)

This is Don Quixote at his best; but the same fine sanity, the same high Christian spirit colours much that he has to say on many and diverse themes—parents and children (c. lxviii), marriage (c. lxix), the duty of a governor (c. xciv), to say nothing of his critical discourses on poetry and the drama.

This, then, is Don Quixote as Cervantes conceived him; but the picture remains incomplete until we see him through the eyes of his squire, for the greatest proof of Don Quixote's courage, sincerity, and goodness is the completeness of the hold which he acquires over the soul of Sancho. There is some carelessness of execution in the second part, some sacrifice of truth to burlesque; the author plays a little down to his audience. But, in general, the picture is admirably conceived and sustained. Sancho has not read chivalrous romances. He cannot read at all. His stock of wisdom is an inexhaustible store of proverbs, the peasant's philosophy of practical experience, the gnomic wisdom of a peasant poet like Hesiod. He understands neither Don Quixote's chivalrous courage nor his ideals of chivalrous love and service. He cannot comprehend why his master should expose himself to unnecessary dangers, when there are no witnesses. When the horrors of the fulling-mill break upon their ears by night and are

<sup>1</sup> In much of this Cervantes is almost translating Dante, unless there is some common scholastic source of these particular applications of texts: 'Unde manifestum est, quod pax universalis est optimum eorum, quae ad nostram beatitudinem ordinantur. Hinc est, quod pastoribus de sursum sonuit, non divitiae, non voluptates, non honores, non longitudo vitae, non sanitas, non robur, non pulchritudo; sed pax. Inquit enim coelestis militia; 'Gloria in altissimis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.' Hinc etiam 'Pax vobis' Salus hominum salutabat. Decebat enim summum Salvatorem, summam salutationem exprimere. Quem quidem morem servare voluerunt Discipuli eius, et Paulus in Salutationibus suis, ut omnibus manifestum esse potest.'—Dante, *De Monarchia* (Oxford, 1904), i. 4.

interpreted by his master as indicating the presence of some terrible monster or giant of romance, Sancho is for beating a prompt retreat : 'Sir, I do not understand why your worship should, it is now night and nobody sees ; we may easily turn aside and get out of harm's way . . . and as nobody sees us, much less will there be anybody to tax us with cowardice.' When he and his master are beaten nearly to death by the Yangueses, and Don Quixote concludes that the misadventure is due to his transgression of the laws of chivalry in fighting with undubbed churls, and that in future Sancho shall do all such plebeian fighting, the latter is by no means disposed to acquiesce. 'Sir,' said Sancho, 'I am a peaceable, tame, quiet man, and can dissemble any injury whatsoever, for I have a wife and children to maintain and bring up ; so that give me leave, Sir, to tell you, by way of hint, that I will upon no account draw my sword either against peasant or against knight ; and that from this time forward I forgive all injuries anyone has done, or shall do me, or that any person is now doing me or may hereafter do me, whether he be high or low, rich or poor, gentle or simple, without excepting any state or condition whatsoever.'

He is equally far from comprehending the nature of Don Quixote's attachment to the fair Dulcinea, the high theory and practice of chivalrous love.

'You perceive not, Sancho, that all this redounds the more to her exaltation . . . for you must know that, in our style of chivalry, it is a great honour for a lady to have many knight-errants who serve her merely for her own sake, without expectation of any other reward of their manifold good deserts than the honour of being admitted into the number of her knights.' 'I have heard it preached', quoth Sancho, 'that God is to be loved with this kind of love, for Himself alone, without our being moved to it by the hope of reward or the fear of punishment ; though, for my part, I am inclined to love and serve Him for what He is able to do for me.' 'The Devil take you for a bumpkin,' said Don Quixote, 'you are ever and anon saying such smart things that one would almost think you had studied.' 'And yet, by my faith,' quoth Sancho, 'I cannot so much as read.'

Sancho is as frankly materialistic and practical as Don Quixote is a romantic and ideal dreamer. Eating and drinking hold a high place in his scale of values. He is not, indeed, a symbol of the claims of the body against a monkish asceticism, like Gargantua and Pantagruel. He is not a bibulous and witty parasite, genial and good-humoured, but shameless and incapable of an unselfish impulse, like the great Sir John Falstaff, our affection for whom is a tribute to Shakespeare's art rather than to any intrinsic amiability of the knight's. We enjoy his company, as we do that of Mrs. Gamp, more

in imagination than we should in actuality, if we stood within the range of his predatory activities. Sancho is neither parasitic nor predatory, though he is not above picking up trifles and he does meditate the possibility of selling the inhabitants of any island that may come his way into slavery; but like all the above-mentioned he loves good living, and the highest epithet in his vocabulary is reserved for that good creature wine. When he and Tom Cecial finished discussing the rabbit-pasty and that supposititious squire put the bottle into Sancho's hand, he grasped it, 'and setting it to his mouth stood gazing at the stars for a quarter of an hour; and having done drinking he let fall his head to one side, and fetching a deep sigh, said, "O whoreson rogue, how *catholic* it is!"' One seems almost to hear the voice of Mr. Belloc or Mr. Chesterton.

By what means, then, has Cervantes made credible Sancho's fidelity to his master? He has undeniably moments of doubt and hesitation. He gets his full share of the drubbings. He cannot convince himself that he has been tossed in the blanket by magicians.

'I too', quoth Sancho, 'would have revenged myself if I could, dubbed or not dubbed; but I could not; though I am of opinion that they who diverted themselves at my expense were no hobgoblins, but men of flesh and bone, as we are; and each of them, as I heard while they were tossing me, had his proper name: one was called Pedro Martinez, another Tenorio Hernandez; and the landlord's name is John Palomeque, the left-handed; so that, Sir, as to your not being able to leap over the pales, nor to alight from your horse, the fault lay in something else and not in enchantment. And what I gather from all this is that these adventures we are in quest of will at the long run bring us into so many misadventures, that we shall not know which is our right foot. So that in my poor opinion the better and surer way would be to return to our village, now that it is reaping time, and look after our business, and not run rambling from Zeca to Mecca, leaping out of the frying-pan into the fire.'

He sees that the priest and the barber and the world generally do not believe in his master's pretensions and promises. At times he joins them in playing upon his delusions. He parodies Don Quixote's heroic speeches. 'This master of mine,' he says, 'by a thousand tokens that I have seen, is mad enough to be tied in his bed; and in truth I come very little behind him, nay I am madder than he is to follow and serve him, if there be any truth in the proverb that says, "Show me thy company and I will tell thee what thou art"; or in that other, "Not with whom thou art bred but with whom thou art fed"'. But Sancho does believe in his master, and it is just this delightful blend of simplicity and shrewdness which makes him so typical a character and so unique a creation of genius.



Sancho's confidence is in the first place a reflection of Don Quixote's. Had the latter for one moment doubted of his mission, had his courage been less impeccable, Sancho's faith must have dissolved in incredulity and contempt. But Don Quixote's faith and courage are unfailing, and Sancho may well ask himself who he is, an unlearned peasant, to discredit such confidence backed by so much knowledge, so much practical good sense, such vivid descriptions. When Don Quixote launches into a rich and glowing account of adventures to come, and the glorious rewards that must ensue, Sancho's imagination kindles at his master's, and he takes up the running, though his anticipations are of a more uniformly material character. For the strongest hook in Sancho's nose is baited with an island. He may not know much about ruling, but in the last resort he can sell the inhabitants into slavery with the Moors.

'This is what I denounce, Señor Sampson,' quoth Sancho, 'for my master makes no more of attacking a hundred armed men than a greedy boy would do of half a dozen melons. Body of me! Signor Bachelor, there must be a time to attack and a time to retreat; and it must not be always *Saint Iago and charge Spain!* I would not have him run away when there is no need of it, nor would I have him follow on when too great superiority requires another thing . . . But if my Lord Don Quixote, in consideration of my many good services, has a mind to bestow on me some one island of the many his worship says he shall light upon, I shall be beholden for the favour; and though he should not give me one, born I am and we must not rely upon one another but upon God, and perhaps the bread I shall eat without the Government may go down more savourily than that I could eat with it . . . yet for all that, if fairly and squarely, without much trouble or danger, Heaven should chance to throw an island or some such thing in my way, I am not such a fool as to refuse it, for it is a saying, when they give you a heifer make haste with the rope, and when good fortune comes be sure to take her aid.'

It may be, Sancho argues in his confused fashion, that the whole quest is an illusion, but it may not be so, and meantime there are occasional prizes, as the hamper on the dead mule, the skimmings of the pot at Camacho's wedding, the plentiful fare at the house of Don Diego or the castle of the duke.

Sancho's faith in his master is thus, it must be confessed, a hope of good things to come. The faith of the common man is seldom entirely devoid of such material ingredients. But it would have been neither true to nature, nor likely to evoke our sympathy for Sancho, to represent this as the sole or principal motive for his loyalty. But Cervantes has taken good care not to do so. The tie which binds

Sancho to his master is simply in the last resort that he loves him. Cervantes has not laboured this. He is writing pure comedy with no such blend of sentiment as colours, for example, Dickens's account of the charming relations, doubtless suggested by Cervantes' master and man, between Pickwick and Sam Weller. But the affection is there, and radiates through the light gaiety and irony of the story. When Tom Cecial, the squire to the Knight of the Looking Glass, who is the humorous Bachelor of Salamanca, declares that *his* master is crack-brained and valiant, but more knavish than valiant, Sancho replies with warmth, 'Mine is not so, I can assure you he has nothing of the knave in him ; on the contrary, he has the soul of a pitcher ; a child may persuade him it is night at noonday ; and for this simplicity I love him as my life, and cannot find in my heart to leave him, let him do never so many extravagances.' When, in the second part, the Duchess challenges Sancho's sincerity his reply is the same : 'By my faith, Madam,' quoth Sancho, 'this same scruple comes in the nick of time ; please your ladyship bid it speak out plain ; for I know it says true, and had I been wise, I should have left my master long ere now, but such was my lot and such my evil errantry. I can do no more ; follow him I must, we are both of the same town ; I have eaten his bread ; I love him ; he returns my kindness ; he gave me his ass colts ; and above all I am faithful, and therefore it is impossible anything should part us but the sexton's spade and shovel.' And if Sancho may not have the island there are innumerable proverbs to console him, and warn him of the vanity of gratified ambitions :

'They make as good bread here as in France ; and, *In the dark all cats are grey* ; and *No stomach is a span bigger than another, and may be filled*, as they say, *with straw or with hay* ; and, *Of the little birds in the air God Himself takes the care* ; and, *Four yards of coarse cloth of Cuença are warmer than as many of fine Segovia serge* . . . and the Pope's body takes up no more room than the sexton's, though the one be higher than the other ; for when we come to the grave we must all shrink and lie close, or be made to shrink and lie close in spite of us ; and so good night ; and therefore I say again that, if your ladyship will not give me the island because I am a fool, I will be so wise as not to care a fig for it ; and I have heard say, *The devil lurks behind the cross* ; and, *All is not gold that glitters* ; and Bamba the husbandman was taken from among his plows, his yokes and oxen, to be king of Spain ; and Roderigo was taken from his brocades, pastimes and riches to be devoured by snakes, if ancient ballads do not lie.'

## II

The popularity of Cervantes' great work, not in Spain only but in other countries of Western Europe, was immediate, and in its influence on the literature of our own country is traceable as early as 1611. But in none of the English imitations of the seventeenth century, including the greatest of these, Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, is there any sign that the work was regarded as more than an amusing extravagance. The apprehension of a higher significance in *Don Quixote*, a significance perhaps higher than the naive genius of Cervantes himself had descried, though once or twice, as I have indicated, he seems to apprehend and suggest it, began with the great English novelists of the eighteenth century. The debt of Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* to *Don Quixote* in respect to structure, incident, e. g. adventures on the road and at inns, dialogues upon all sorts of subjects not always relevant to the plot, inset tales, manner, style, and spirit, can hardly be over-estimated. But Cervantes' work was more for Fielding than a burlesque of a romance, more even than a great comic epic in prose, a model for his own genial and humorous picture of English life; and if there never was work, as Professor Fitzmaurice Kelly tells us, more heartily national than *Don Quixote*, more native to the heroic soil that gave it being, it is equally true that his first great literary son was the most English of all Englishmen. 'Of all the works of imagination, to which the English imagination has given origin,' says Sir Walter Scott, 'the writings of Henry Fielding are, perhaps, most decisively and exclusively her own. They are not only altogether beyond the reach of translation, in the proper sense and spirit of the work, but we even question whether they can be fully understood, or relished to the highest extent by such natives of Scotland and Ireland as are not habitually and intimately acquainted with the characters and manners of old England.' *Don Quixote* was for Fielding not merely a novel but a great and humorous satire on human life, and the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance a type of the central figure in his own humorous and satirical picture of English life. For what, after all, one may ask, is the hero of Cervantes' romance? Is he not a type of the Christian whose Christianity is more than a speculative belief or a magical means of personal salvation, a lofty if fantastic idealist whose practical faith in his ideals no ignominy and no rebuff can destroy. 'For verily,' says St. Paul, 'when we were with you we told you beforehand that we are to suffer afflictions; even as it came to pass and ye know.' 'This I can say for myself,' declares Don Quixote, 'that since I have been



a knight-errant, I have become valiant, civil, liberal, affable, patient, a sufferer of toils, imprisonments, and enchantments; and though it be so little a while since I saw myself locked up in a cage like a madman, yet I expect, by the valour of my arm, Heaven favouring, and Fortune not opposing, in a few days to see myself king of a realm in which I may display the gratitude and liberality enclosed in this breast of mine.' Is that very different in spirit from the language of the great Christian who in the service of his ideal had been 'in journeyings often, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in cold and nakedness', and yet is a happier man than before he was the slave of Christ? And if Don Quixote's fantastic idealism needs the support of a sure and certain hope of kingdoms yet to be conquered, dreams of a golden day when he shall be received at the city gates with music and by fair damsels who will escort him to the right hand of the king whose throne and honour he has delivered from the enmity of giants and magicians and evil knights, is not St. Paul also sustained by a dream which never came true in the form he anticipated: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord'?

In Don Quixote Fielding found an adumbration of the type of Christian which the robuster minds of the century found more essential than either the scheme-of-salvation theologian of the seventeenth or the Puritan ideal (as that reappeared in Richardson's novel, intent upon the personal virtues of chastity and temperance)—the man for whom the first of Christian virtues were the social virtues of justice and mercy; and in Don Quixote's misadventures they saw the fate of the man who endeavours to put into practice those principles of Christian charity and benevolence to which we all assent on Sunday. It was a strange delusion of Carlyle that the eighteenth century was a waste chaos of scepticism in religion and politics, an age of universal doubt. In fact, there was more faith in the little finger of some of the greatest men of that century, Fielding and Johnson, Howard and Wilberforce, Goldsmith and Burke (with all his fears), than in the whole body of the Victorians except Dickens, Lord Shaftesbury, and perhaps Browning. For intellectual scepticism is not so fatal an enemy of faith as the spiritual pessimism of Jeremiahs like Carlyle and Ruskin, such faint-hearts as Tennyson, or such epicures of melancholy as Matthew Arnold. The great spirits of the eighteenth century believed in their fellow-men. They recognized the evils of life without

preferring an indictment against Providence. They noted with clear and amused eye the faults and follies of men without ceasing to love and respect their virtues.

What, for example, is Fielding's Parson Adams but a muscular, absent-minded Don Quixote? He has his love of literature—of Homer and Aeschylus rather than of Amadis and Palmerin (but Don Quixote also knows his classics), and above all he has the same impeccable courage, the same rigid adherence to the ideals he professes, the same splendid unworldliness and immunity to disillusionment. A crucial instance is the scene in which Adams and Joseph and Fanny discover that they have no money wherewith to pay their bill at the inn where Joseph has been cared for after his mishap with the highwaymen. 'They stood silent for some few minutes staring at each other, when Adams whipped round on his toes and asked the hostess if there was no clergyman in that parish? She answered, "there was." "Is he wealthy?" replied he, to which she likewise answered in the affirmative. Adams then, snapping his fingers, returned overjoyed to his companions, crying out, "Heureka! Heureka!" which not being understood he told them in plain English, they need give themselves no trouble, for he had a brother in the parish who would defray the account, and that he would just step to his house and fetch the money and return to them instantly.' Parson Trulliber, to whom he proceeds, imagines at first that he has come to see the fat pigs of which he is a breeder, and it is only after an accident somewhat disastrous to Parson Adams's appearance that he is enabled to explain the purpose of his visit. 'I think, sir, it is high time to inform you of the business of my embassy. I am a traveller and am passing this way in company with two young people, a lad and a damsel. We stopped at a house of hospitality in the parish, where they directed me to you as having the cure.' 'Though I am the curate,' says Trulliber, 'I believe I am as warm as the vicar himself, or perhaps the rector of the next parish too; I believe I could buy them both.' 'Sir,' cries Adams, 'I rejoice thereat. Now, sir, my business is, that we are by various accidents stripped of our money, and are not able to pay our reckoning, being seven shillings. I therefore request you to assist me with the loan of those seven shillings, and also seven shillings more, which, peradventure, I shall return to you, but if not, I am convinced you will joyfully embrace such an opportunity of laying up a treasure in a better place than any this world affords.' It is unnecessary to continue from the inimitable scene. It is sufficient to say that Don Quixote was not more mistaken when he took sheep for knights and windmills for giants than was

Parson Adams when he took for granted that a Christian pastor would welcome an opportunity of laying up treasure in a better place than any this world affords. Parson Trulliber is quite prepared to take the risk of the moth and the rust.

The type of character represented by Parson Adams appears and reappears in the works of the great eighteenth-century novelists, and of those Victorian novelists whose work belongs to the same humanitarian and satiric tradition. In the same class are Roderick Random's sailor uncle, Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield, and, in a manner which is peculiar to Sterne, so is the tender-hearted, fantastic Uncle Toby. Cervantes, as well as Smollett and Fielding, was among the authors in the old library which Dickens found and read as a boy at Rochester; and certainly Mr. Pickwick, as he developed under the hand of his creator, became a reincarnation of the same type, a Quixote of kindness with a weakness for milk-punch and bottled beer, just as certainly as the coupling of this simple, middle-aged, good-hearted gentleman with the alert, knowing, ready-witted, good-hearted Sam Weller was suggested by the relations between Don Quixote and his squire. The same easy relations prevail between master and man, with the same occasional fits of dignified self-assertion on the part of the master. Thackeray read and comments with delight in a letter upon *Don Quixote*, when he was preparing to write *The Newcomes*, and certainly Colonel Newcome is perhaps the last appearance of Don Quixote in the varying guise in which the eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists had conceived him.

In more ways than one, therefore, Cervantes in *Don Quixote* builded better than he knew; transcended the original intention of his work. He invented the prototype of the novel of everyday life and manners, the comic epic in prose, as that was to take shape finally in the work of the great English novelists of the eighteenth century; and, in his hero, he depicted more than the victim of a taste for romantic reading, he created a fantastic but yet honour-compelling type of the idealism of the human heart rising superior to every disillusioning experience in virtue of impeccable courage, indomitable faith, and a vivid imagination. From the victim of a satire on romance, Don Quixote became in the eighteenth century the hero of a profounder satire, in which not he but the world that ridicules him, not his ideals but the society which professes to honour them, is arraigned, and made conscious of the interval which divides the professions and the practice of a so-called Christian civilization. In *Don Juan* Byron sums up the thought of the past century about Cervantes' great work, but he does so in the more sombre tone that



denotes a change of temper which was to make the literature of the nineteenth century more interested in another picture of the idealist in conflict with reality and compelled in this harsh world to draw his breath in pain :

I should be very willing to redress  
Men's wrongs, and rather check than punish vice,  
Had not Cervantes in that too true tale  
Of Quixote shown how all such efforts fail.

Of all tales 'tis the saddest, and more sad  
Because it makes us smile : his hero's right,  
And still pursues the right : to curb the bad  
His only object, and—'gainst odds to fight  
His guerdon, 'tis his virtue makes him mad.  
But his adventures form a sorry sight :  
A sorrier still is the great moral taught  
By that real epic unto all who've thought.

Redressing injury, revenging wrong,  
To aid the damsel and destroy the caitiff;  
Opposing singly the united strong,  
From foreign yoke to free the helpless native :  
Alas ! must noblest views, like an old song,  
Be for mere fancy's sport a theme creative.

The type of the idealist temperament in collision with reality to which the century of Schopenhauer and Carlyle and Ibsen and Tolstoi and the other great Russian novelists turned by preference was that which Shakespeare had elaborated from an old revenge play by Thomas Kyd in the years in which Cervantes was writing the first part of his novel, and which Molière drew with sympathetic and refined irony some sixty years later. Hamlet as Shakespeare conceived him and Alceste in *Le Misanthrope* (1666) are representatives of that type of idealist who at the first touch of disillusionment, the first overthrow by the strong and indifferent windmills of actuality, the first acute realization of the interval that separates what men do from what they ought to do, loses at once and for ever that faith in human nature in which idealism is rooted.

'Hamlet', says a German critic, commenting on Goethe's criticism, 'is indeed a lovely vase full of costly flowers, for he is a pure human being penetrated by enthusiasm for the Great and Beautiful, living wholly in the ideal, and above all things full of faith in a man. And the vase is shattered into atoms from within ; this and just this Goethe truly felt—but what causes the ruin of the vase is not that the great deed of avenging a father exceeds his strength, but it is the discovery of the falseness of man, the discovery of the contradiction between the ideal world and the actual, which suddenly confronts him as a picture of man : it is in fact what he gradually finds in himself

as the true portrait of the human nature which he deified—in short, Hamlet perishes because the gloomy background of life is suddenly unrolled before him, because the sight of this robs him of his faith in life and in good, and because he now cannot act. Only that man can act for others and for all who is inwardly sound, and Hamlet's mind is out of joint after he has been robbed of his earlier faith. . . . The great Protestant doctrine of man's need of faith, of faith as the condition of peace, and of the fulfilment of his mission as a moral being—this it is to which this profoundest of all the works of Shakespeare's genius owes its origin.'

Whether this be entirely Shakespeare's Hamlet or not, it is the Hamlet which the nineteenth century took to its heart, and which found so many counterparts in the Russian and Scandinavian literature of disillusionment. The Nihilist, as Prince Kropotkin has described him, aimed at the same uncompromising sincerity as Alceste demands; the lack of which in Polonius and Ophelia and the courtiers deepens Hamlet's aesthetic disgust of life. The Nihilist probing the mystery of his own will and of the world, violating every inhibition that he may find if there be a Will at all, other than his own, any power behind the world of phenomena which has taken into its keeping the cause of good against evil, if God really *be*—what is he, as Dostoevsky describes him in Stavrogin the hero of *The Possessed*, but a Russian Hamlet of the nineteenth century, finding no motive to act, no meaning in anything? Most interesting of all is Ibsen's *Brand*, for it is a *Don Quixote* written by and in the spirit of a Hamlet. The Lutheran pastor living out his creed of service and loyalty to his flock, even to the last sacrifice of child and wife, is a Don Quixote without any of his happiness, because in his heart is a great doubt, the doubt of Stavrogin, not the faith of Don Quixote. He wills to pursue his ideal of 'all or nothing', not because he believes, but in despairing and passionate quest of assurance and belief.

Nothing is more significant in *Don Quixote* than the relation of Sancho and his master. For what, after all, is Sancho? A Spanish peasant as typically Spanish as his chivalrous master, is he not, allowing for national peculiarities and for the exaggeration of comedy, just the common man of every country, whose intrinsic worth and the charm of whose touching simplicity this war has revealed in camp and hospital and hut,—shrewd like Sancho and practical, a humorist and a little material in his aims and tastes, fond of eating and drinking when the opportunity offers, but neither a selfish debauchee like the witty but depraved Falstaff, nor a Rabelaisian Pantagruel, and with an infinite capacity for faith and hero-worship? The common people have always believed in and followed the idealist, Christ, Mahomet,

Joan of Arc, not always understanding the language he spoke, and prone to interpret it literally and materially, but reverencing his high and self-forgetting spirit. They have never understood or listened to the sceptic. There is no character so solitary as the man who has lost his faith in his fellow-men. And *Don Quixote* is the happiest of books, the best of anodynes at a time like the present, because it renews our faith in humanity, not only by its sunny but unsentimental picture of normal everyday life and character, but because its twin heroes are of all men the most happy—the idealist whose faith no disappointment can altogether destroy, the common man who takes life as he finds it, with no philosophy beyond that of experience and proverbs, but who loves and believes in the master he follows. Not even the necessary disillusionment of the close of Don Quixote's fantastic career, despite some careless slips of the casual creator of all this delight in many shapes, can quite take away the impression of boundless belief and hope, for Don Quixote but wakens from one dream to pass into another, the great dream of the Christian faith: 'But awake he did at the end of that time, and with a loud voice said, "Blessed be Almighty God, who has vouchsafed me so great a good; in short His mercies have no bounds, and the sins of men can neither lessen nor obstruct them"'.







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